

PRESS RELEASE

MARY ELLEN BARTLEY

June 10- July 12, 2020

Return to Summer Reading



Reading Color #24, 2020, 13 x 18 in



Reading Color #18, 2020, 13 x 18 in

The Drawing Room is pleased to present **MARY ELLEN BARTLEY Return to Summer Reading**, an exhibition on view by appointment in East Hampton from June 10 through July 6, 2020. An illustrated online catalog is accessible on the gallery's website: www.drawingroom-gallery.com.

A longtime resident of the East End, Bartley is a passionate bibliophile and accomplished photographer known for her subtle photographs inspired by both the physical and formal properties of books.

Over the last decade The Drawing Room has presented several exhibitions of Bartley's photographic series that document local, private libraries of noted individuals from the East End community. Among the collections she has photographed on site for rich context are the Beale family's collection of weathered hardbacks at Grey Gardens in East Hampton, Jackson Pollock's personal library of classic art and poetry books in Springs, and Robert Wilson's intimate library at The Watermill Center. In creating her new work, Bartley turned her camera toward the concrete qualities of her own books.

In 2019, Bartley came upon bins of second hand midcentury paperbacks at The Strand Bookstore in New York City. Captivated by the lush color of their dyed pages, she began amassing hundreds of mass-market pulp books to create stacked formal arrangements in her studio. *Return to Summer Reading* presents twelve tranquil still lifes of tightly composed clusters of paperbacks. Using the camera to explore both painterly and sculptural elements, Bartley unifies the sensuous qualities of her subjects through her mastery of natural light effects.

Without visible clues to the titles or authors, the eyelevel, tabletop stacks of paperbacks evoke striped architectural monuments. Scale is a mystery in the chunky novels sandwiched between thin volumes positioned for rhythm, contour and hue. Crisp shadows of the rag paper edges dissolve into towers of incised, faded color. Through her engagement with the found palette of lime, tangerine, gold, magenta and raspberry pulp, Bartley casts her own private history upon the stacks, transforming books into evocative abstract structures. Bright and muted bands of color offer a slow

meditation on abstraction and the considered and idiosyncratic arrangements individuals make with their own books.

Inspired by Giorgio Morandi's intimate still lifes of vases and ceramic jugs, Bartley recently spent time exploring his library as a Visiting Artist at Casa Morandi, at the Museo Morandi in the Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna. While the residency was cut short by the outbreak of the pandemic, Bartley preserved her experience of the gentle rose tone of the Bolognese light in the new photographs of American pulp fiction paperbacks she created back home in her Sag Harbor garret studio.

Mary Ellen Bartley's photographs have been shown at numerous institutions including The Walker Art Center, the Houston Center for Photography, Guild Hall Museum and the National Museum of Archeology and Ethnology, Guatemala. In 2011, the painter Ross Bleckner chose Bartley to include her work alongside his at the Parrish Art Museum's *Artists Choose Artists* exhibition. In 2015 Bartley completed a site-specific project at the Watermill Center titled *Reading Robert Wilson* that was accompanied by a "book of books" and led to her 2017 residency and installation at The Queens Museum. Notable series she produced subsequently include *Reading Grey Gardens* and *Jackson Pollock's Books*. Bartley was recently selected to participate in *La Mère La Mer*, an exhibition curated by Kevin Moore at the McEvoy Foundation for the Arts in 2019. The artist has also been awarded residencies at the Penumbra Foundation in New York, NY and the Museo Morandi in Bologna, Italy.